Characters

- lady in brown
- lady in yellow
- lady in red
- lady in green
- lady in blue
- lady in orange
- lady in purple

Act

The stage is in darkness. Harsh music is heard as dim blue lights come up. One after another, seven women run onto the stage from each of the exits. They all freeze in postures of distress. The follow spot picks up the lady in brown. She comes to life and looks around at the other ladies. All of the others are still. She walks over to the lady in red and calls to her. The lady in red makes no response.

LADY IN BROWN
dark phrases of womanhood
of never havin been a girl
half-notes scattered
without rhythm/ no tune distraught laughter fallin
over a black girl's shoulder it's funny/ it's hysterical
the melody-less-ness of her dance
don't tell nobody don't tell a soul
she's dancin on beer cans & shingles
this must be the spook house
another song with no singers
lyrics/ no voices
& interrupted solos
unseen performances
are we ghouls?
children of horror?
the joke?
don't tell nobody don't tell a soul
are we animals? have we gone crazy?
i can't hear anythin
but maddening screams
& the soft strains of death
& you promised me
you promised me . . . somebody/ anybody
sing a black girl's song
bring her out
to know herself
to know you
but sing her rhythms

carin/ struggle/ hard times
sing her song of life
she's been dead so long
closed in silence so long she doesn't know the sound
of her own voice
her infinite beauty
she's half-notes scattered
without rhythm/ no tune
sing her sighs
sing the song of her possibilities
sing a righteous gospel
let her be born
let her be born
& handled warmly.
LADY IN BROWN

i'm outside chicago

LADY IN YELLOW

i'm outside detroit

LADY IN PURPLE

i'm outside houston

LADY IN RED

i'm outside baltimore

LADY IN GREEN

i'm outside san francisco

LADY IN BLUE

i'm outside manhattan

LADY IN ORANGE

i'm outside st˙ louis

LADY IN BROWN
& this is for colored girls who have considered suicide
but moved to the ends of their own rainbows.
everyone
mama's little baby likes shortnin, shortnin,
mama's little baby likes shortnin bread
mama's little baby likes shortnin, shortnin,
mama's little baby likes shortnin bread
little sally walker, sittin in a saucer
rise, sally, rise, wipe your weepin eyes
an put your hands on your hips

an let your backbone slip
o, shake it to the east
o, shake it to the west
shake it to the one
that you like the best
LADY IN PURPLE

you're it

As the lady in brown tags each of the other ladies they freeze. When each one has been tagged the lady in brown freezes. Immediately "Dancing in the Streets" by Martha and the Vandellas is heard. Allof the ladies start to dance. The lady in green, the lady in blue, and the lady in yellow do the pony, the big boss line, the swim, and the nose dive. The other ladies dance in place.

LADY IN YELLOW
it was graduation nite & i waz the only virgin in the crowd
bobby mills martin jerome & sammy yates eddie jones & randi
all cousins
all the prettiest niggers in this factory town
carried me out wit em
in a deep black buick
smellin of thunderbird & ladies in heat
we rambled from camden to mount holly
laughin at the afternoon's speeches
& danglin our tassles from the rear view mirror
climbin different sorta project stairs
movin toward snappin beer cans &
GET IT GET IT THAT'S THE WAY TO DO IT MAMA
all mercer county graduated the same nite
cosmetology secretarial pre-college autoshop & business
all us movin from mama to what ever waz out there
that nite we raced a big ol truck from the barbeque stand
trying to tell him bout the party at jacqui's
where folks graduated last year waz waitin to hit it wid us
i got drunk & cdnt figure out
whose hand waz on my thigh/ but it didn't matter
cuz these cousins martin eddie sammy jerome & bobby
waz my sweethearts alternately since the seventh grade
& everybody knew i always started cryin if somebody actually
tried to take advantage of me
at jacqui's
ulinda mason was stickin her mouth all out
while we tumbled out the buick
eddie jones waz her lickin stick
but i knew how to dance
it got soo hot
vincent ramos puked all in the punch
& harly jumped all in tico's face
cuz he was leavin for the navy in the mornin
hadda kick ass so we'd all remember how bad he waz
seems like sheila & marguerite waz fraid

to get their hair turnin back
so they laid up against the wall
lookin almost sexy
didnt wanna sweat
but me & my fellas we waz dancin
since 1963 i'd won all kinda contests
wid the cousins at the POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE DANCES
all mercer county knew
any kin to martin yates cd turn somersaults
fore smokey robinson cd get a woman excited

The Dells singing "Stay" is heard

we danced doin nasty ol tricks

The lady in yellow sings along with the Dells for a moment. The lady in orange and the lady in blue jump up and parody the lady in yellow and the Dells. The lady in yellow stares at them. They sit down.

doin nasty ol tricks i'd been thinkin since may
cuz graduation nite had to be hot
& i waz the only virgin
so i hadda make like my hips waz inta some business
that way everybody thot whoever was gettin it
was a older man cdnt run the streets wit youngsters
martin slipped his leg round my thigh
the dells bumped "stay"
up & down — up & down the new carver homes
WE WAZ GROWN WE WAZ FINALLY GROWN
ulinda alla sudden went crazy
went over to eddie cursin & carryin on
tearin his skin wid her nails
the cousins tried to talk sense to her
tried to hold her arms
lissin bitch sammy went on
bobby whispered i shd go wit him
fore they go ta cuttin
fore the police arrived
we teetered silently thru the parkin lot
no un uhuh
we didn't know nothin bout no party
bobby started lookin at me
yeah
he started looking at me real strange
like i waz a woman or somethin/
tarted talkin real soft
in the backseat of that ol buick
WOW
by daybreak
i just cdnt stop grinnin.

The Dells singing "Stay" comes in and all of the ladies except the lady in blue join in and sing along.

LADY IN BLUE

you gave it up in a buick?

LADY IN YELLOW

yeh, and honey, it was wonderful.

LADY IN GREEN
we used to do it all up in the dark
in the corners. . .
LADY IN BLUE

some niggah sweating all over you.

LADY IN RED

it was good!

LADY IN BLUE

i never did like to grind.

LADY IN YELLOW

what other kind of dances are there?

LADY IN BLUE

mambo, bomba, merengue

when i waz sixteen i ran off to the south bronx
cuz i waz gonna meet up wit willie colon
& dance all the time
mamba bomba merengue
LADY IN YELLOW

do you speak spanish?

LADY IN BLUE
olà
my papa thot he was puerto rican & we wda been
cept we waz just reglar niggahs wit hints of spanish
so off i made it to this 36 hour marathon dance
con salsa con ricardo
‘sugggggggggar’ ray on southern blvd
next door to this fotografi place
jammed wit burial weddin & communion relics
next door to la real ideal genuine spanish barber
up up up up up stairs & stairs & lotsa hallway
wit my colored new jersey self
didn't know what anybody waz saying
cept if dancin waz proof of origin

i was jibarita herself that nite
& the next day
i kept smilin & right on steppin
if he cd lead i waz ready to dance
if he cdnt lead
i caught this attitude
i'd seen rosa do
& wd not be bothered
i waz twirlin hippin givin much quik feet
& bein a mute cute colored puerto rican
til saturday afternoon when the disc-jockey say
‘SORRY FOLKS WILLIE COLON AINT GONNA MAKE IT TODAY’
& alla my niggah temper came outta control
& i wdnt dance wit nobody
& i talked english loud
& i love you more than i waz mad
uh huh uh huh
more than more than
when i discovered archie shepp & subtle blues
doncha know i wore out the magic of juju
heroically resistin being possessed
ooooooooooooh the sounds
sneakin in under age to slug's
to stare ata real ‘artiste’
& every word outta imamu's mouth waz gospel
& if jesus cdnt play a horn like shepp
waznt no need for colored folks to bear no cross at all
& poem is my thank-you for music
& i love you more than poem
more than aureliano buendia loved macondo
more than hector lavoe loved himself
more than the lady loved gardenias
more than celia loves cuba or graciela loves el son
more than the flamingoes shoo-do-n-doo-wah love bein pretty
oyè négro
te amo mas que te amo mas que
when you play
yr flute
everyone

(very softly)

te amo mas que te amo mas que

LADY IN RED
without any assistance or guidance from you
i have loved you assiduously for 8 months 2 wks & a day
i have been stood up four times
i've left 7 packages on yr doorstep
forty poems 2 plants & 3 handmade notecards i left
town so i cd send to you have been no help to me

on my job
you call at 3:00 in the mornin on weekdays
so i cd drive 27½ miles cross the bay before i go to work
charmin charmin
but you are of no assistance
i want you to know
this waz an experiment
to see how selfish i cd be
if i wd really carry on to snare a possible lover
if i waz capable of debasin my self for the love of another
if i cd stand not being wanted
when i wanted to be wanted
& i cannot
so
with no further assistance & no guidance from you
i am endin this affair
this note is attached to a plant
i've been waterin since the day i met you
you may water it
yr damn self
LADY IN ORANGE
i dont wanna write
in english or spanish
i wanna sing make you dance
like the bata dance scream
twitch hips wit me cuz
i done forgot all abt words
aint got no definitions
i wanna whirl
with you

Music starts, "Che Che Cole" by Willie Colon. Everyone starts to dance.

our whole body
wrapped like a ripe mango
ramblin whippin thru space
on the corner in the park
where the rug useta be
let willie colon take you out
swing your head
push your leg to the moon with me
i'm on the lower east side
in new york city
and i can't i can't
talk witchu no more
LADY IN YELLOW

we gotta dance to keep from cryin

LADY IN BROWN

we gotta dance to keep from dyin

LADY IN RED

so come on

LADY IN BROWN

come on

LADY IN PURPLE

come on

LADY IN ORANGE
hold yr head like it was ruby sapphire
i'm a poet
who writes in english
come to share the worlds witchu
everyone
come to share our worlds witchu
we come here to be dancin
to be dancin
to be dancin
baya

There is a sudden light change, all of the ladies react as if they had been struck in the face. The lady in green and the lady in yellow run out up left, the lady in orange runs out the left volm, the lady in brown runs out up right.

LADY IN BLUE

a friend is hard to press charges against

LADY IN RED
if you know him
you must have wanted it
LADY IN PURPLE

a misunderstanding

LADY IN RED
you know
these things happen
LADY IN BLUE
are you sure
you didnt suggest
LADY IN PURPLE

had you been drinkin

LADY IN RED
a rapist is always to be a stranger
to be legitimate
someone you never saw

a man wit obvious problems
LADY IN PURPLE

pin-ups attached to the insides of his lapels

LADY IN BLUE

ticket stubs from porno flicks in his pocket

LADY IN PURPLE

a lil dick

LADY IN RED

or a strong mother

LADY IN BLUE

or just a brutal virgin

LADY IN RED
but if you've been seen in public wit him
danced one dance
kissed him good-bye lightly
LADY IN PURPLE

wit closed mouth

LADY IN BLUE
pressin charges will be as hard
as keepin yr legs closed
while five fools try to run a train on you
LADY IN RED
these men friends of ours
who smile nice
stay employed
and take us out to dinner
LADY IN PURPLE

lock the door behind you

LADY IN BLUE
wit fist in face
to fuck
LADY IN RED
who make elaborate mediterranean dinners
& let the art ensemble carry all ethical burdens
while they invite a coupla friends over to have you
are sufferin from latent rapist bravado
& we are left wit the scars
LADY IN BLUE

bein betrayed by men who know us

LADY IN PURPLE
& expect
like the stranger
we always thot waz comin
LADY IN BLUE

that we will submit

LADY IN PURPLE

we must have known

LADY IN RED
women relinquish all personal rights
the presence of a man
who apparently cd be considered a rapist
LADY IN PURPLE

specially if he has been considered a friend

LADY IN BLUE
he is no less worthy of bein beat witin an inch of his life
bein publicly ridiculed
havin two fists shoved up his ass
LADY IN RED
man the stranger
he always thot it wd be
LADY IN BLUE
who never showed up
LADY IN RED

az it turns out the nature of rape has changed

LADY IN BLUE

we can now meet them in circles we frequent for companionship

LADY IN PURPLE

we see them at the coffeehouse

LADY IN BLUE

wit someone else we know

LADY IN RED
we cd even have em over for dinner
& get raped in our own houses
by invitation
a friend

The lights change, and the ladies are all hit by an imaginary slap, the lady in red runs off up left.

LADY IN BLUE

eyes

LADY IN PURPLE

mice

LADY IN BLUE

womb

lady in blue & lady in purple

nobody

The lady in purple exits up right.

LADY IN BLUE
tubes tables white washed windows
grime from age wiped over once
legs spread
anxious
eyes crawling up on me
eyes rollin in my thighs
metal horses gnawin my womb
dead mice fall from my mouth
i really didnt mean to
i really didnt think i cd
just one day off . . .
get offa me alla this blood
bones shattered like soft ice-cream cones
i cdnt have people
lookin at me
pregnant
i cdnt have my friends see this
dyin danglin tween my legs
& i didnt say a thing
not a sigh
or a fast scream
to get
those eyes offa me
get them steel rods outta me
this hurts
this hurts me
& nobody came
cuz nobody knew
once i waz pregnant & shamed of myself.

The lady in blue exits stage left volm.

Soft deep music is heard, voices calling "Sechita" come from the wings and volms. The lady in purple enters from up right.

LADY IN PURPLE
once there were quadroon balls/ elegance in st˙ louis/ laced
mulattoes/ gamblin down the mississippi/ to memphis/ new
orleans n okra crepes near the bayou/ where the poor white trash
wd sing/ moanin/ strange/ liquid tones/ thru the swamps/

The lady in green enters from the right volm; she is Sechita and for the rest of the poem dances out Sechita's life.

sechita had heard these things/ she moved
as if she'd known them/ the silver n high-toned laughin/
the violins n marble floors/ sechita pushed the clingin
delta dust wit painted toes/ the patch-work tent waz
poka-dotted/ stale lights snatched at the shadows/ creole
carnival waz playin natchez in ten minutes/ her splendid
red garters/ gin-stained n itchy on her thigh/ blk-diamond
stockings darned wit yellow threads/ an ol starched taffeta
can-can fell abundantly orange/ from her waist round the
splinterin chair/ sechita/ egyptian/ goddess of creativity/
2nd millennium/ threw her heavy hair in a coil over her neck/
sechita/ goddess/ the recordin of history/ spread crimson oil
on her cheeks/ waxed her eyebrows/ n unconsciously slugged
the last hard whiskey in the glass/ the broken mirror she
used to decorate her face/ made her forehead tilt backwards/
her cheeks appear sunken/ her sassy chin only large enuf/
to keep her full lower lip/ from growin into her neck/ sechita/
had learned to make allowances for the distortions/
but the heavy dust of the delta/ left a tinge of grit n
darkness/ on every one of her dresses/ on her arms & her
shoulders/ sechita/ waz anxious to get back to st˙ louis/
the dirt there didnt crawl from the earth into yr soul/
at least/ in st˙ louis/ the grime waz store bought
second-hand/ here in natchez/ god seemed to be wipin his
feet in her face/
one of the wrestlers had finally won
tonite/ the mulatto/ raul/ was sposed to hold the boomin
half-caste/ searin eagle/ in a bear hug/ 8 counts/ get
thrown unawares/ fall out the ring/ n then do searin eagle
in for good/ sechita/ cd hear redneck whoops n slappin on
the back/ she gathered her sparsely sequined skirts/ tugged
the waist cincher from under her greyin slips/ n made her face
immobile/ she made her face like nefertiti/ approachin her
own tomb/ she suddenly threw/ her leg full-force/ thru the
canvas curtain/ a deceptive glass stone/ sparkled/ malignant
on her ankle/ her calf waz tauntin in the brazen carnie
lights/ the full moon/ sechita/ goddess/ of love/ egypt/
2nd millennium/ performin the rites/ the conjurin of men/
conjurin the spirit/ in natchez/ the mississippi spewed

a heavy fume of barely movin waters/ sechita's legs slashed
furiously thru the cracker nite/ & gold pieces hittin the
makeshift stage/ her thighs/ they were aimin coins tween her
thighs/ sechita/ egypt/ goddess/ harmony/ kicked viciously
thru the nite/ catchin stars tween her toes.

The lady in green exits into the stage left volm, the lady in purple exits into up stage left.

The lady in brown enters from up stage right.

LADY IN BROWN
de library waz right down from de trolly tracks
cross from de laundry-mat
thru de big shinin floors & granite pillars
ol st˙ louis is famous for
i found toussaint
but not til after months uv
cajun katie/ pippi longstockin
christopher robin/ eddie heyward & a pooh bear
in the children's room
only pioneer girls & magic rabbits
& big city white boys
i knew i waznt sposedta
but i ran inta the ADULT READING ROOM
& came across

TOUSSAINT

my first blk man
(i never counted george washington carver
cuz i didnt like peanuts)
still
TOUSSAINT waz a blk man a negro like my mama say
who refused to be a slave
& he spoke french
& didnt low no white man to tell him nothin
not napolean
not maximillien
not robespierre
TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE
waz the beginnin uv reality for me
in the summer contest for
who colored child can read
15 books in three weeks
i won & raved abt TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE
at the afternoon ceremony
waz disqualified
cuz Toussaint
belonged in the ADULT READING ROOM
& i cried
& carried dead Toussaint home in the book
he waz dead & livin to me

cuz TOUSSAINT & them
they held the citadel gainst the french
wid the spirits of ol dead africans from outta the ground
TOUSSAINT led they army of zombies
walkin cannon ball shootin spirits to free Haiti
& they waznt slaves no more

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

became my secret lover at the age of 8
i entertained him in my bedroom
widda flashlight under my covers
way inta the night/ we discussed strategies
how to remove white girls from my hopscotch games
& etc˙
TOUSSAINT
waz layin in bed wit me next to raggedy ann
the night i decided to run away from my
integrated home
integrated street
integrated school
1955 waz not a good year for lil blk girls
Toussaint said ‘lets go to haiti’
d ‘awright’
& some very important things in a brown paper bag
so i wdnt haveta come back
then Toussaint & i took the hodiamont streetcar
to the river
last stop
only 15¢
cuz there waznt nobody cd see Toussaint cept me
& we walked all down thru north st˙ louis
where the french settlers usedta live
in tiny brick houses all huddled together
wit barely missin windows & shingles uneven
wit colored kids playin & women on low porches sippin beer
i cd talk to Toussaint down by the river
like this waz where we waz gonna stow away
on a boat for new orleans
& catch a creole fishin-rig for port-au-prince
then we waz just gonna read & talk all the time
& eat fried bananas
we waz just walkin & skippin past ol drunk men
when dis ol young boy jumped out at me sayin
'HEY GIRL YA BETTAH COME OVAH HEAH N TALK TO ME'
well
i turned to TOUSSAINT (who waz furious)
& i shouted
'ya silly ol boy
ya bettah leave me alone
or TOUSSAINT'S gonna get yr ass'

de silly ol boy came round de corner laughin all in my face
‘yellah gal
ya sure must be somebody to know my name so quick’
i waz disgusted
& wanted to get on to haiti
widout some tacky ol boy botherin me
still he kept standin there
kickin milk cartons & bits of brick
tryin to get all in my business
i mumbled to L'OUVERTURE ‘what shd I do’
finally
i asked this silly ol boy
‘WELL WHO ARE YOU?’
he say
‘MY NAME IS TOUSSAINT JONES’
well
i looked right at him
those skidded out cordoroy pants
a striped teashirt wid holes in both elbows
a new scab over his left eye
& i said
‘what’s yr name again'
he say
‘i'm toussaint jones’
‘wow
i am on my way to see
TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE in HAITI
are ya any kin to him
he dont take no stuff from no white folks
& they gotta country all they own
& there aint no slaves’
that silly ol boy squinted his face all up
‘looka heah girl
i am TOUSSAINT JONES
& i'm right heah lookin at ya
& i dont take no stuff from no white folks
ya dont see none round heah do ya?’
& he sorta pushed out his chest
then he say
‘come on lets go on down to the docks
& look at the boats’
i waz real puzzled goin down to the docks
wit my paper bag & my books
i felt TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE sorta leave me
& i waz sad
til i realized
TOUSSAINT JONES waznt too different
from TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE
cept the ol one waz in haiti
& this one wid me speakin english & eatin apples
yeah.

toussaint jones waz awright wit me
no tellin what all spirits we cd move
down by the river
st˙ louis 1955 hey wait.

The lady in brown exits into the stage right volm.

The lady in red enters from the stage left volm.

LADY IN RED
orange butterflies & aqua sequins
ensconsed tween slight bosoms
silk roses dartin from behind her ears
the passion flower of southwest los angeles
meandered down hoover street
past dark shuttered houses where
women from louisiana shelled peas
round 3:00 & sent their sons
whistlin to the store for fatback & black-eyed peas
she glittered in heat
& seemed to be lookin for rides
when she waznt & absolutely
eyed every man who waznt lame white or noddin out
she let her thigh slip from her skirt
crossin the street
she slowed to be examined
& she never looked back to smile
or acknowledge a sincere ‘hey mama’
or to meet the eyes of someone
purposely findin sometin to do in
her direction
she waz sullen
& the rhinestones etchin the corners of her mouth
suggested tears
fresh kisses that had done no good
she always wore her stomach out
lined with small iridescent feathers
the hairs round her navel seemed to dance
& she didnt let on
she knew
from behind her waist waz aching to be held
the pastel ivy drawn on her shoulders
to be brushed with lips & fingers
smellin of honey & jack daniels
she waz hot
a deliberate coquette
who never did without
what she wanted
& she wanted to be unforgettable
she wanted to be a memory
a wound to every man

arragant enough to want her
she waz the wrath
of women in windows
fingerin shades/ ol lace curtains
camoflagin despair &
stretch marks
so she glittered honestly
delighted she waz desired
& allowed those especially
schemin/ tactful suitors
to experience her body & spirit
tearin/ so easily blendin with theirs/
& they were so happy
& lay on her lime sheets full & wet
from her tongue she kissed
them reverently even ankles
edges of beards . . .

The stage goes to darkness except for a special on the lady in red, who lies motionless on the floor; as the lights slowly fade up the lady in red sits up.

at 4:30 AM
she rose movin the arms & legs that trapped her
she sighed affirmin the sculptured man
& made herself a bath
of dark musk oil egyptian crystals
& florida water to remove his smell
to wash away the glitter
to watch the butterflies melt into
suds & the rhinestones fall beneath
her buttocks like smooth pebbles
in a missouri creek
layin in water
she became herself
ordinary
brown braided woman
with big legs & full lips
reglar
seriously intendin to finish her
night's work
she quickly walked to her guest
straddled on her pillows & began
‘you'll have to go now/ i've
a lot of work to do/ & i cant
with a man around/ here are yr pants/
there's coffee on the stove/ its been
very nice/ but i cant see you again/
you got what you came for/ didnt you’
& she smiled
he wd either mumble curses bout crazy bitches
or sit dumbfounded

while she repeated
‘i cdnt possibly wake up/ with
a strange man in my bed/ why
dont you go home’
she cda been slapped upside the head
or verbally challenged
but she never waz
& the ones who fell prey to the
dazzle of hips painted with
orange blossoms & magnolia scented wrists
had wanted no more
than to lay between her sparklin thighs
& had planned on leavin before dawn
& she had been so divine
devastatingly bizarre the way
her mouth fit round
& now she stood a
reglar colored girl
fulla the same malice
livid indifference as a sistah
worn from supportin a wd be hornplayer
or waitin by the window
& they knew
& left in a hurry
she wd gather her tinsel &
jewels from the tub
& laugh gayly or vengeful
she stored her silk roses by her bed
& when she finished writin
the account of her exploit in a diary
embroidered with lilies & moonstones
she placed the rose behind her ear
& cried herself to sleep.

All the lights fade except for a special on the lady in red; the lady in red exits into the stage left volm.

The lady in blue enters from up right.

LADY IN BLUE
i usedta live in the world
then i moved to HARLEM
& my universe is now six blocks
when i walked in the pacific
i imagined waters ancient from accra/ tunis
cleansin me/ feedin me
now my ankles are coated in grey filth
from the puddle neath the hydrant
my oceans were life
what waters i have here sit stagnant
circlin ol men's bodies
shit & broken lil whiskey bottles

left to make me bleed
i usedta live in the world
now i live in harlem & my universe is six blocks
a tunnel with a train
i can ride anywhere
remaining a stranger
NO MAN YA CANT GO WIT ME/ I DONT EVEN
KNOW YOU/ NO/ I DONT WANNA KISS YOU/
YOU AINT BUT 12 YRS OLD/ NO MAN/ PLEASE
PLEASE PLEASE LEAVE ME ALONE/ TOMORROW/ YEAH/
NO/ PLEASE/ I CANT USE IT
i cd stay alone
a woman in the world
then i moved to
HARLEM
i come in at dusk
stay close to the curb

The lady in yellow enters, she's waiting for a bus.

round midnite
praying wont no young man
think i'm pretty in a dark mornin

The lady in purple enters, she's waiting for a bus.

wdnt be good
not good at all
to meet a tall short black brown young man fulla his power
in the dark
in my universe of six blocks
straight up brick walls
women hangin outta windows
like ol silk stockings
cats cryin/ children gigglin/ a tavern wit red curtains
bad smells/ kissin ladies smilin & dirt
sidewalks spittin/ men cursing/ playin

The lady in orange enters, she is being followed by a man, the lady in blue becomes that man.

‘I SPENT MORE MONEY YESTERDAY
THAN THE DAY BEFORE & ALL THAT'S MORE N YOU
NIGGAH EVER GOTTA HOLD TO
COME OVER HERE BITCH
CANT YA SEE THIS IS $5’
never mind sister
dont pay him no mind
go go go go go go sister
do yr thing
never mind
i usedta live in the world
really be in the world

free & sweet talkin
good mornin & thank-you & nice day
uh huh
i cant now
i cant be nice to nobody
nice is such a rip-off
reglar beauty & a smile in the street
is just a set-up
i usedta be in the world
a woman in the world
i hadda right to the world
then i moved to harlem
for the set-up
a universe
six blocks of cruelty
piled up on itself
a tunnel
closin

The four ladies on stage freeze, count 4, then the ladies in blue, purple, yellow and orange move to their places for the next poem.

LADY IN PURPLE
three of us like a pyramid
three friends
one laugh
one music
one flowered shawl
knotted on each neck
we all saw him at the same time
& he saw us
i felt a quick thump in each one of us
didnt know what to do
we all wanted what waz comin our way
so we split
but he found one
& she loved him
the other two were tickled
& spurned his advances
when the one who loved him waz somewhere else
he wd come to her saying
yr friends love you very much
i have tried
& they keep askin where are you
she smiled
wonderin how long her friends
wd hold out
he waz what they were lookin for
he bided his time
he waited til romance waned
the three of us made up stories

bout usedta & cda been nice
the season waz dry
no men
no quickies
not one dance or eyes unrelentin
one day after another
cept for the one who loved him
he appeared irregularly
expectin graciousness no matter what
she cut fresh strawberries
her friends callt less frequently
went on hunts for passin fancies
she cdnt figure out what waz happenin
then the rose
she left by his pillow
she found on her friends desk
& there waz nothing to say
she said
i wanna tell you
he's been after me
all the time
says he's free & can explain
what's happenin wit you
is nothin to me
& i dont wanna hurt you
but you know i need someone now
& you know
how wonderful he is
her friend cdnt speak or cry
they hugged & went to where he waz
wit another woman
he said good-bye to one
tol the other he wd call
he smiled a lot
she held her head on her lap
the lap of her sisters soakin up tears
each understandin how much love stood between them
how much love between them
love between them
love like sisters

Sharp music is heard, each lady dances as if catching a disease from the lady next to her, suddenly they all freeze.

LADY IN ORANGE
ever since i realized there waz someone callt
a colored girl an evil woman a bitch or a nag
i been tryin not to be that & leave bitterness
in somebody else's cup/ come to somebody to love me
without deep & nasty smellin scald from lye or bein
left screamin in a street fulla lunatics/ whisperin

slut bitch bitch niggah/ get outta here wit alla that/
i didnt have any of that for you/ i brought you what joy
i found & i found joy/ honest fingers round my face/ with
dead musicians on 78's from cuba/ or live musicians on five
dollar lp's from chicago/ where i have never been/ & i love
willie colon & arsenio rodriquez/ especially cuz i can make
the music loud enuf/ so there is no me but dance/ & when
i can dance like that/ there's nothin cd hurt me/ but
i get tired & i haveta come offa the floor & then there's
that woman who hurt you/ who you left/ three or four times/
& just went back/ after you put my heart in the bottom of
yr shoe/ you just walked back to where you hurt/ & i didnt
have nothin/ so i went to where somebody had somethin for me/
but he waznt you/ & i waz on the way back from her house
in the bottom of yr shoe/ so this is not a love poem/ cuz there
are only memorial albums available/ & even charlie mingus
wanted desperately to be a pimp/ & i wont be able to see eddie
palmieri for months/ so this is a requium for myself/ cuz i
have died in a real way/ not wid aqua coffins & du-wop cadillacs/
i used to joke abt when i waz messin round/ but a real dead
lovin is here for you now/ cuz i dont know anymore/ how
to avoid my own face wet wit my tears/ cuz i had convinced
myself colored girls had no right to sorrow/ & i lived
& loved that way & kept sorrow on the curb/ allegedly
for you/ but i know i did it for myself/
i cdnt stand it
i cdnt stand bein sorry & colored at the same time
it's so redundant in the modern world
LADY IN PURPLE
i lived wit myths & music waz my ol man & i cd dance
a dance outta time/ a dance wit no partners/ take my
pills & keep right on steppin/ linger in non-english
speakin arms so there waz no possibility of understandin
& you YOU came sayin i am the niggah/ i am the baddest muthafuckah
out there/
i said yes/ this is who i am waitin for
& to come wit you/ i hadta bring everythin
the dance & the terror
the dead musicians & the hope
& those scars i had hidden wit smiles & good fuckin
lay open
& i dont know i dont know any more tricks
i am really colored & really sad sometimes & you hurt me
more than i ever danced outta/ into oblivion isnt far enuf
to get outta this/ i am ready to die like a lily in the
desert/ & i cdnt let you in on it cuz i didnt know/ here
is what i have/ poems/ big thighs/ lil tits/ &
so much love/ will you take it from me this one time/
please this is for you/ arsenio's tres cleared the way
& makes me pure again/ please please/ this is for you
i want you to love me/ let me love you/ i dont wanna

dance wit ghosts/ snuggle lovers i made up in my drunkenness/
lemme love you just like i am/ a colored girl/ i'm finally bein
real/ no longer symmetrical & impervious to pain
LADY IN BLUE
we deal wit emotion too much
so why dont we go on ahead & be white then/
& make everythin dry & abstract wit no rhythm & no
reelin for sheer sensual pleasure/ yes let's go on
& be white/ we're right in the middle of it/ no use
holdin out/ holdin onto ourselves/ lets think our
way outta feelin/ lets abstract ourselves some families
& maybe maybe tonite/ i'll find a way to make myself
come without you/ no fingers or other objects just thot
which isnt spiritual evolution cuz its empty & godliness
is plenty is ripe & fertile/ thinkin wont do me a bit of
good tonite/ i need to be loved/ & havent the audacity
to say
where are you/ & dont know who to say it to
LADY IN YELLOW
i've lost it touch wit reality/ i dont know who's doin it
i thot i waz but i waz so stupid i waz able to be hurt
& that's not real/ not anymore/ i shd be immune/ if i'm
still alive & that's what i waz discussin/ how i am still
alive & my dependency on other livin beins for love
i survive on intimacy & tomorrow/ that's all i've got goin
& the music waz like smack & you knew abt that
& still refused my dance waz not enuf/ & it waz all i had
but bein alive & bein a woman & bein colored is a metaphysical
dilemma/ i havent conquered yet/ do you see the point
my spirit is too ancient to understand the separation of
soul & gender/ my love is too delicate to have thrown
back on my face

The ladies in red, green, and brown enter quietly; in the background all of the ladies except the lady in yellow are frozen; the lady in yellow looks at them, walks by them, touches them; they do not move.

LADY IN YELLOW

my love is too delicate to have thrown back on my face

The lady in yellow starts to exit into the stage right volm. Just as she gets to the volm, the lady in brown comes to life.

LADY IN BROWN

my love is too beautiful to have thrown back on my face

LADY IN PURPLE

my love is too sanctified to have thrown back on my face

LADY IN BLUE

my love is too magic to have thrown back on my face

LADY IN ORANGE

my love is too saturday nite to have thrown back on my face

LADY IN RED

my love is too complicated to have thrown back on my face

LADY IN GREEN

my love is too music to have thrown back on my face

everyone
music
music

The lady in green then breaks into a dance, the other ladies follow her lead and soon they are all dancing and chanting together.

LADY IN GREEN

yank dankka dank dank

everyone

music

LADY IN GREEN

yank dankka dank dank

everyone

music

LADY IN GREEN

yank dankka dank dank

everyone

(but started by the lady in yellow)

delicate
delicate
delicate
everyone

(but started by the lady in brown)

and beautiful
and beautiful

and beautiful
everyone

(but started by the lady in purple)

oh sanctified
oh sanctified
oh sanctified
everyone

(but started by the lady in blue)

magic
magic
magic
everyone

(but started by the lady in orange)

and saturday nite
and saturday nite
and saturday nite
everyone

(but started by the lady in red)

and complicated
and complicated
and complicated
and complicated
and complicated
and complicated
and complicated
and complicated
and complicated

The dance reaches a climax and all of the ladies fall out tired, but full of life and togetherness.

LADY IN GREEN
somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff
not my poems or a dance i gave up in the street
but somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff
like a kleptomaniac workin hard & forgettin while stealin
this is mine/ this aint yr stuff/
now why dont you put me back & let me hang out in my own self
somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff
& didnt care enuf to send a note home sayin
i waz late for my solo conversation
or two sizes too small for my own tacky skirts
what can anybody do wit somethin of no value on
a open market/ did you getta dime for my things/
hey man/ where are you goin wid alla my stuff/
this is a woman's trip & i need my stuff/

to ohh & ahh abt/ daddy/ i gotta mainline number
from my own shit/ now wontchu put me back/ & let
me play this duet/ wit this silver ring in my nose/
honest to god/ somebody almost run off wit alla my stuff/
& i didnt bring anythin but the kick & sway of it
the perfect ass for my man & none of it is theirs
this is mine/ ntozake 'her own things'/ that's my name/
now give me my stuff/ i see ya hidin my laugh/ & how i
sit wif my legs open sometimes/ to give my crotch
some sunlight/ & there goes my love my toes my chewed up finger nails/ niggah/ wif the curls in yr hair/
Mr˙ louisiana hot link/ i want my stuff back/
my rhythms & my voice/ open my mouth/ & let me talk ya
outta/ throwin my shit in the sewar/ this is some delicate
leg & whimsical kiss/ i gotta have to give to my choice/
without you runnin off wit alla my shit/
now you cant have me less i give me away/ & i waz
doin all that/ til ya run off on a good thing/
who is this you left me wit/ some simple bitch
widda bad attitude/ i wants my things/
i want my arm wit the hot iron scar/ & my leg wit the
flea bite/ i want my calloused feet & quik language back
in my mouth/ fried plantains/ pineapple pear juice/
sun-ra & joseph & jules/ i want my own things/ how i lived them/
& give me my memories/ how i waz when i waz there/
you cant have them or do nothin wit them/
stealin my shit from me/ dont make it yrs/ makes it stolen/
somebody almost run off wit alla my stuff/ & i waz standin
there/ lookin at myself/ the whole time
& it waznt a spirit took my stuff/ waz a man whose
ego walked round like Rodan's shadow/ waz a man faster
n my innocence/ waz a lover/ i made too much
room for/ almost run off wit alla my stuff/
& i didnt know i'd give it up so quick/ & the one running wit it/
dont know he got it/ & i'm shoutin this is mine/ & he dont
know he got it/ my stuff is the anonymous ripped off treasure
of the year/ did you know somebody almost got away with me/
me in a plastic bag under their arm/ me
danglin on a string of personal carelessness/ i'm spattered wit
mud & city rain/ & no i didnt get a chance to take a douche/
hey man/ this is not your perogative/ i gotta have me in my
pocket/ to get round like a good woman shd/ & make the poem
in the pot or the chicken in the dance/ what i got to do/
i gotta have my stuff to do it to/
why dont ya find yr own things/ & leave this package
of me for my destiny/ what ya got to get from me/
i'll give it to ya/
yeh/ i'll give it to ya/ round 5:00 in the winter/ when the sky is blue-red/
& Dew City is gettin pressed/ if it's really my stuff/
ya gotta give it to me/ if ya really want it/ i'm
the only one/ can handle it
LADY IN BLUE

that niggah will be back tomorrow, sayin ‘i'm sorry’

LADY IN YELLOW
get this, last week my ol man came in sayin, ‘i don't know
how she got yr number baby, i'm sorry‘
LADY IN BROWN

no this one is it, ‘o baby, ya know i waz high, i'm sorry’

LADY IN PURPLE
‘i'm only human, and inadequacy is what makes us human, &
if we was perfect we wdnt have nothin to strive for, so you
might as well go on and forgive me pretty baby, cause i'm sorry’
LADY IN GREEN

‘shut up bitch, i told you i waz sorry’

LADY IN ORANGE
no this one is it, ‘i do ya like i do ya cause i thot
ya could take it, now i'm sorry’
LADY IN RED
‘now i know that ya know i love ya, but i aint ever gonna
love ya like ya want me to love ya, i'm sorry’
LADY IN BLUE
one thing i dont need
is any more apologies
i got sorry greetin me at my front door
you can keep yrs
i dont know what to do wit em
they dont open doors
or bring the sun back
they dont make me happy
or get a mornin paper
didnt nobody stop usin my tears to wash cars
cuz a sorry
i am simply tired
of collectin
i didnt know i was so important toyou'
i'm gonna haveta throw some away
i cant get to the clothes in my closet
for alla the sorries
i'm gonna tack a sign to my door
leave a message by the phone
‘if you called
to say yr sorry
call somebody
else
i dont use em anymore’
i let sorry/ didnt meanta/ & how cd i know abt that
take a walk down a dark & musty street in brooklyn
i'm gonna do exactly what i want to
& i wont be sorry for none of it

letta sorry soothe yr soul/ i'm gonna soothe mine
you were always inconsistent
doin somethin & then bein sorry
beatin my heart to death
talkin bout you sorry
well
i will not call
i'm not goin to be nice
i will raise my voice
& scream & holler
& break things & race the engine
& tell all yr secrets bout yrself to yr face
& i will list in detail everyone of my wonderful lovers
& their ways
i will play oliver lake
loud
& i wont be sorry for none of it
i loved you on purpose
i was open on purpose
i still crave vulnerability & close talk
& i'm not even sorry
bout you bein sorry you can carry all the guilt & grime ya wanna
just dont give it to me
i cant use another sorry
next time
you should admit
you're mean/ low-down/ triflin/ & no count straight out
steada bein sorry alla the time
enjoy bein yrself
LADY IN RED
there waz no air/ the sheets made ripples under his
body like crumpled paper napkins in a summer park/ & lil
specks of somethin from tween his toes or the biscuits
from the day before ran in the sweat that tucked the sheet
into his limbs like he waz an ol frozen bundle of chicken/
& he'd get up to make coffee, drink wine, drink water/ he
wished one of his friends who knew where he waz wd come by
with some blow or some shit/ anythin/ there waz no air/
he'd see the spotlights in the alleyways downstairs movin
in the air/ cross his wall over his face/ & get under the
covers & wait for an all clear or til he cd hear traffic
again/
there waznt nothin wrong
with him/ there waznt nothin wrong with him/ he kept tellin crystal/
any niggah wanna kill vietnamese children more n stay home
& raise his own is sicker than a rabid dog/
that's how their thing had been goin since he got back/
crystal just got inta sayin whatta fool niggah beau waz
& always had been/ didnt he go all over uptown sayin the
child waznt his/ waz some no counts bastard/ & any ol city
police cd come & get him if they wanted/ cuz as soon as

the blood type & shit waz together/ everybody wd know that
crystal waz a no good lyin whore/ and this after she'd been
his girl since she waz thirteen/ when he caught her
on the stairway/
he came home crazy as hell/ he tried to get veterans benefits
to go to school & they kept right on puttin him in
remedial classes/ he cdnt read wortha damn/ so beau
cused the teachers of holdin him back & got himself
a gypsy cab to drive/ but his cab kept breakin
down/ & the cops was always messin wit him/ plus not
gettin much bread/
& crystal went & got pregnant again/ beau most beat
her to death when she tol him/ she still gotta scar
under her right tit where he cut her up/ still crystal
went right on & had the baby/ so now beau willie had
two children/ a little girl/ naomi kenya & a boy/ kwame beau
willie brown/ & there waz no air/
how in the hell did he get in this mess anyway/ somebody
went & tol crystal that beau waz spendin alla his money
on the bartendin bitch down at the merry-go-round cafe/
beau sat straight up in the bed/ wrapped up in the sheets
lookin like john the baptist or a huge baby wit stubble
& nuts/ now he hadta get alla that shit outta crystal's
mind/ so she wd let him come home/ crystal had gone &
got a court order saying beau willie brown had no access
to his children/ if he showed his face he waz subject
to arrest/ shit/ she'd been in his ass to marry her
since she waz 14 years old & here when she 22/ she wanna
throw him out cuz he say he'll marry her/ she burst
out laughin/ hollerin whatchu wanna marry me for now/
so i can support yr
ass/ or come sit wit ya when they lock yr behind
up/ cause they gonna come for ya/ ya goddamn lunatic/
they gonna come/ & i'm not gonna have a thing to do
wit it/ o no i wdnt marry yr pitiful black ass for
nothin & she went on to bed/
the next day beau willie came in blasted & got ta swingin
chairs at crystal/ who cdnt figure out what the hell
he waz doin/ til he got ta shoutin bout how she waz gonna
marry him/ & get some more veterans benefits/ & he cd
stop drivin them crazy spics round/ while they tryin
to kill him for $15/ beau waz sweatin
terrible/ beatin on crystal/ & he cdnt do no more with the table n chairs/
so he went to get the high chair/ & lil kwame waz in it/
& beau waz beatin crystal with the high chair & her son/
& some notion got inta him to stop/ and he run out/
crystal most died/ that's why the police wdnt low
beau near where she lived/ & she'd been tellin the kids
their daddy tried to kill her & kwame/ & he just wanted
to marry her/ that's what/ he wanted to marry her/ &
have a family/ but the bitch waz crazy/ beau willie

waz sittin in this hotel in his drawers drinkin
coffee & wine in the heat of the day spillin shit all
over hisself/ laughin/ bout how he waz gonna get crystal
to take him back/ & let him be a man in the house/ & she
wdnt even have to go to work no more/ he got dressed
all up in his ivory shirt & checkered pants to go see
crystal & get this mess all cleared up/
he knocked on the door to crystal's rooms/ & she
didnt answer/ he beat on the door & crystal & naomi
started cryin/ beau gotta shoutin again how he wanted
to marry her/ & waz she always gonna be a whore/ or
did she wanna husband/ & crystal just kept on
screamin for him to leave us
alone/ just leave us alone/ so beau broke the door down/ crystal held
the children in fronta her/ she picked kwame off the
floor/ in her arms/ & she held naomi by her shoulders/
& kept on sayin/ beau willie brown/ get outta here/
the police is gonna come for ya/ ya fool/ get outta here/
do you want the children to see you act the fool again/
you want kwame to brain damage from you throwin him
round/ niggah/ get outta here/ get out & dont show yr
ass again or i'll kill ya/
i swear i'll kill ya/ he reached for naomi/ crystal grabbed the lil girl &
stared at beau willie like he waz a leper or somethin/
dont you touch my children/ muthafucker/ or i'll kill
you/
beau willie jumped back all humble & apologetic/ i'm
sorry/ i dont wanna hurt em/ i just wanna hold em &
get on my way/ i dont wanna cuz you no more trouble/
i wanted to marry you & give ya things
what you gonna give/ a broken jaw/ niggah get outta here/
he ignored crystal's outburst & sat down motionin for
naomi to come to him/ she smiled back at her daddy/
crystal felt naomi givin in & held her tighter/
naomi/ pushed away & ran to her daddy/ cryin/ daddy, daddy
come back daddy/ come back/ but be nice to mommy/
cause mommy loves you/ and ya gotta be nice/
he sat her on his knee/ & played with her ribbons &
they counted fingers & toes/ every so often he
looked over to crystal holdin kwame/ like a statue/
& he'd say/ see crystal/ i can be a good father/
now let me see my son/ & she didnt move/ &
he coaxed her & he coaxed her/ tol her she waz
still a hot lil ol thing & pretty & strong/ didnt
she get right up after that lil ol fight they had
& go back to work/ beau willie oozed kindness &
crystal who had known so lil/ let beau hold kwame/
as soon as crystal let the baby outta her arms/ beau
jumped up a laughin & a gigglin/ a hootin & a hollerin/
awright bitch/ awright bitch/ you gonna marry me/
you gonna marry me . . .

i aint gonna marry ya/ i aint ever gonna marry ya/
for nothin/ you gonna be in the jail/ you gonna be
under the jail for this/ now gimme my kids/ ya give
me back my kids/
he kicked the screen outta the window/ & held the kids
offa the sill/ you gonna marry me/ yeh, i'll marry ya/
anything/ but bring the children back in the house/
he looked from where the kids were hangin from the
fifth story/ at alla the people screamin at him/ &
he started sweatin again/ say to alla the neighbors/
you gonna marry me/
i stood by beau in the window/ with naomi reachin
for me/ & kwame screamin mommy mommy from the fifth
story/ but i cd only whisper/ & he dropped em
LADY IN RED

i waz missin somethin

LADY IN PURPLE

somethin so important

LADY IN ORANGE

somethin promised

LADY IN BLUE

a layin on of hands

LADY IN GREEN

fingers near my forehead

LADY IN YELLOW

strong

LADY IN GREEN

cool

LADY IN ORANGE

movin

LADY IN PURPLE

makin me whole

LADY IN ORANGE

sense

LADY IN GREEN

pure

LADY IN BLUE

all the gods comin into me layin me open to myself

LADY IN RED

i waz missin somethin

LADY IN GREEN

somethin promised

LADY IN ORANGE

somethin free

LADY IN PURPLE

a layin on of hands

LADY IN BLUE
i know bout/ layin on bodies/ layin outta man
bringin him alla my fleshy self & some of my pleasure
bein taken full eager wet like i get sometimes
i waz missin somethin
LADY IN PURPLE

a layin on of hands

LADY IN BLUE

not a man

LADY IN YELLOW

layin on

LADY IN PURPLE
not my mama/ holdin me tight/ sayin
i'm always gonna be her girl
not a layin on of bosom & womb
a layin on of hands
the holiness of myself released
LADY IN RED
i sat up one nite walkin a boardin house
screamin/ cryin/ the ghost of another woman
who waz missin what i waz missin
i wanted to jump up outta my bones
& be done wit myself
leave me alone

& go on in the wind
it waz too much
i fell into a numbness
til the only tree i cd see
took me up in her branches
held me in the breeze
made me dawn dew
that chill at daybreak
the sun wrapped me up swingin rose light everywhere
the sky laid over me like a million men
i waz cold/ i waz burnin up/ a child & endlessly weavin garments for the moon
wit my tears
i found god in myself
& i loved her/ i loved her fiercely

All of the ladies repeat to themselves softly the lines 'i found god in myself & i loved her.' It soon becomes a song of joy, started bythe lady in blue. The ladies sing first to each other, then gradually to the audience. After the song peaks the ladies enter into a closed tight circle.

LADY IN BROWN
& this is for colored girls who have considered
suicide/ but are movin to the ends of their own
rainbows

(THE END.)